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What does it mean to live a Creative Life?

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What does it mean to live a Creative Life?

by

Latise Hairston

An Abstract of a Project

in

Creative Studies

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Science

May 2018

Buffalo State

State University of New York

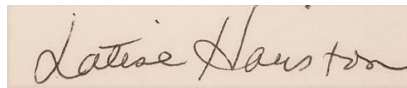
Department of Creative Studies

Abstract

What does it mean to live a creative life?

The purpose of this project was to become an explorer in the world of creativity for the purpose of learning and self-improvement. On a weekly basis, as a creativity explorer, I researched a theory related to the expressive arts and personal development or engaged in an experience (i.e. travel) to discover “what it means to live a creative life.” The discoveries are discussed, including key learnings, products of the project, and workshop activities to assist others in exploring their creative lives. A sampling of the journey through photographs, expressive journaling and poetry are represented.

Keywords: creative arts, creativity, everyday creativity, expressive arts, travel

A rectangular box containing a handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Laticia Houston".

Signature

May 5, 2018

Date

Buffalo State
State University of New York
Department of Creative Studies

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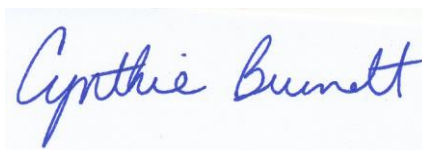
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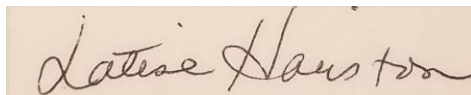
Master of Science
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Dr. Cyndi Burnett
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May 5, 2018

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Student

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Acknowledgments

First of all, I would like to thank my project advisor Dr. Burnett for her support, patience, and feedback. She helped me to converge throughout the process of planning and writing for this project. Otherwise, this project would have been me exploring the entire world of creativity in a few months. Dr. Burnett was always gracious, kind, and timely with her feedback, which allowed me to stay on track.

Secondly, I would like to thank my family, especially my husband who persevered through the many hours of me spending time in the books and on my computer. I promised not to pursue another degree anytime soon.

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge all of my friends in the creativity community. When you become a part of this community, they treat you like family. They are quick to share, collaborate, and to hug. I would especially like to thank my cohort and my two sounding board partners, Jocelyn and Melissa. Thank you for your support and lending an ear. I'm grateful to have you both in my life.

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SECTION ONE: BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT

Purpose and Description of Project

The purpose of this project was to become an explorer in the world of creativity for the purpose of learning and self-improvement. An explorer travels new territory for adventure or discovery. On a weekly basis, as a creativity explorer, I researched a theory related to the expressive arts and personal development or engage in an experience (i.e., travel) to discover “what it means to live a creative life.” The products of this project are a journal and pictorial description of the journey. Further, I developed workshop activities to assist others in exploring their creative lives.

There is evidence that engagement with artistic creative efforts, can serve to enhance emotional, psychological, and physical health (Stuckey & Nobel, 2010). Goessling and Doyle (2009) explained that the expression or application of human creative skill and imagination can open one to the idea that anything is possible and, therefore, boost self-esteem. They further asserted that the use of imagination can instill hope and belief that there are alternatives and possibilities to what is. Photographs and artwork can serve as a medium for externalization that may provide feelings of distance and safety for individuals when discussing themselves or personal issues on a deep level (Goessling & Doyle, 2009). Art can serve as a means to “travel” to familiar and unfamiliar places within the heart, mind, and soul toward future possibilities.

Art, music, dance, drama, photography, and poetry therapies are referred to as “creative arts therapies” because of their roots in the arts and theories of creativity (Malchiodi, 2014). Expressive writing (i.e., poetry, journaling, storytelling) studies have been linked to improvements in physical health, reductions in doctor visits, and better immune system functioning (Pennebaker, 2000; Stuckey & Nobel, 2010). Positive health and behavioral effects

have been found in all social classes and major racial/ethnic groups (Pennebaker, 2000). Journal writing is a way to link to the unconscious self. It has been linked to creativity, spiritual awareness, and greater self-knowledge (Pennebaker, 2000).

Other studies have found that engaging in visual arts have resulted in improvements in flow and spontaneity, positive identity, increases in healing, reduction in stress, an improved focus on positive life experiences, and self-worth (Reynolds & Lim, 2007; Reynolds & Prior, 2003; Samoray, 2006). Similar benefits have been found with movement-based creative expression. For example, Picard (2000) studied women in their midlife who engaged in creative movement. Creative movement was shown to support self-awareness, with patterns of meaning identified in relationships with others, self, and spirit.

Lastly, studies have shown that travel may increase creativity by relieving stress, providing a diversity of experiences and increasing positive emotions (de Bloom, Ritter, Kühnel, Reinders, & Geurts, 2014; Maddux, Adam, & Galinsky, 2010). Consequently, it boosts creativity, leading to greater flexibility and originality of ideas. Further, exposure to multicultural experiences has been positively related to the likelihood of engaging in “some creativity-supporting processes—generation of unconventional ideas” (Maddux, Adam, & Galinsky, 2010, p.731). According to Stuckey and Nobel (2010), “through creativity and imagination, we find our identity and our reservoir of healing” (p. 261).

Rationale for Selection

Recently, I have been obsessed with travel shows about expats and those who travel the world. I admire their fearlessness and sense of adventure. That’s one of the visions that I have for myself – to no longer play it safe. My thirteen-day trip to Morocco and engagement in the expressive arts (e.g. journaling, photography, dance, expressive writing) allowed me to explore

another part of the world, and my own inner world to begin to learn “what it means to live a deliberately creative life.”

One of my favorite definitions of creativity is Ackoff and Veraga’s (1988), “the ability to overcome self-imposed constraints” (p. 79). Building on this definition and focusing on the internal locus of control and a positive future outcome, my definition of creativity is “to push past the inner voices of limitation and lack; to move toward possibilities and potential and manifest them” (Hairston, April 16, 2017). Weston (2007) described,

Creativity is the art of expanding possibility. It is the art of finding expected space in problems that seem totally stuck to everyone else. It is the ability to think ‘out of the box’ while the rest of us barely realize that we are in the box. (p. VI)

My subconscious has been screaming “let me out”. One of the goals of this project was to document my journey to living a creative life, full of possibility, opportunity, and self-improvement.

SECTION TWO: PERTINENT LITERATURE

Introduction

The following section describes the books, journal articles, websites and Ted Talks that have provided information and inspiration into my journey of living a creative life. The resources listed are related to the key categories related to this project, including, everyday creativity, the expressive arts, mindfulness, nature and creativity, photography and creativity, and the seminal work of Sid Parnes about visioning.

Resources

Amabile, T. M. (2017). In pursuit of everyday creativity. *The Journal of Creative Behavior*, 51(4), 335-337. 10.1002/jocb.200

This article appeared in the Journal of Creative Behavior's 50th Anniversary edition. In it, Amabile posed the question, "When ordinary people undertake creative endeavors in their work or in their non-work lives, what is the nature of their everyday psychological experiences, and how do these experiences affect creative outcomes?" (p. 3). She goes on to say that little is known and more research is needed in this area to advance the study and practice of creativity. Amabile described some of the findings from her own research. Creativity is higher when emotions and perceptions are more positive. Further, it was discovered that when people are trying to be creative they not only experience, but also describe a rich and wide variety of emotions, perceptions, and motivations that color the quality of their lives.

As I have embarked on this journey of discovering what it means to live a creative life, I'm intentional in noting my emotions, perceptions, motivations, and how the overall quality of my life is impacted. I have experienced a profound sense of joy, wonder, curiosity, and sometimes transcendental moments since I began this journey.

Burnett, B., & Evans, D. (2016). *Designing your life*. New York, NY: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group.

Burnett and Evans contended that people need a process in order to change. They presented a step-by-step process of how to think like a designer, and how to design and build a life in which you can thrive at any age. Designers don't just think their way forward, they build their way forward. Certain mindsets are associated with designing your life including, curiosity, bias to action, reframing, and radical collaboration.

Curiosity makes everything new and invites exploration. Bias to action involves being committed to building your way forward. Designers are constantly testing and trying new things out. They are open to change and are always curious about what will happen next, not focused on what the final results will be. Reframing is how designers get unstuck. Life designing is not about figuring what to do with the rest of your life, but simply about what to do next. This allows for stepping back, examining biases, and moving toward solutions. Finally, radical collaboration reinforces that we are not in alone. Design is a collaborative process and many ideas come from surrounding ourselves with a community of people.

This project is all about designing a creative life. Every new exploration is about curiosity and openness to new experiences. A few weeks into the project I found out that my job of twenty-one years would be ending in December. I'm applying all the concepts to me – designing a new life one step at a time, building and knowing that I have a great community of support.

Chen, B. (2016). Conscientiousness and everyday creativity among Chinese undergraduate students. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 102, 56-59.

doi:10.1016/j.paid.2016.06.061

This study examined the relationships between personality and everyday creativity among Chinese college students. The results indicated that openness and extraversion were positively related to everyday creativity. They also found that conscientiousness (individual differences in impulse control, organization, conformity, persistence, hard work, and responsibility) was positively related to everyday creativity. The researchers concluded that for the average person, it is important to work hard to produce creatively in their daily life, however, they may not continue to persevere in creative activities without conscientiousness.

An aspect of conscientiousness is purposeful action and a drive to achieve. I have had to make a conscious choice to live a creative life. It is at the forefront of my mind and actions which drive me toward change.

Conner, T. S., & Silvia, P. J. (2015). Creative days: A daily diary study of emotion, personality, and everyday creativity. *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts*, 9(4), 463-470.

doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/aca0000022

Conner and Silvia (2015) sought to answer the question, “What are creative days like?” They aimed to understand the ecology of everyday creativity: how certain emotions help or hinder creative pursuits and who behaves more creatively on a daily basis. The sample included 658 young adults who rated their creativity and their experience of 18 positive and negative emotional states each day for 13 days using an internet daily diary method. The findings indicated that creative days were days filled with energy and enthusiasm. They were days when

participants felt vigorous and engaged. Happy days and relaxed days were also creative days, but not as much as energetic days.

People higher in openness were more likely to have creative days. Their creativity was more strongly tied to their emotions than any other personality traits. The data suggested that cultivation of certain emotions and certain traits like openness may foster greater creativity in daily life. Conner and Silvia (2015) proposed that “choosing environments, activities, and people that foster enthusiasm, motivation, and engagement and expanding ourselves into environments and situations may be the emotional keys to a creative life” (p. 469).

Dhiman, S. (2012). Mindfulness and the art of living creatively: Cultivating a creative life by minding our mind. *Journal of Social Change*, 4(1), 24-33.

doi:10.5590/JOSC.2012.04.1.03

The focus of this article was on the role of mindful creativity in life and work. Dhiman explored the relationship between mindfulness as a creative process and the concept of flow. It is argued that to achieve creative fulfillment or flow, one has to achieve a certain measure of awareness regarding the contents of one’s consciousness. Mindfulness as a meditative practice helps to raise this awareness. Dhiman contended that being mindfully aware of one’s inner and outer world, one notices new things, which in turn helps one to become more creative and alive. Thus, mindfulness can serve as a basis for creativity, flow, and meaningful engagement with life in its myriad manifestations.

In the article, Dhiman’s (2012) depicts the relationship among creativity, flow, and mindfulness as interrelated circles. Alert attention is a distinguishing characteristic of mindfulness, signifying both creativity and flow and in turn, it is reinforced by both of them. All

three have beneficial effects on the workplace environment through mental and physical well-being.

Since beginning this project, I have started practicing mindfulness. I downloaded the Headspace app which guides and teaches the daily practice of meditation.

Dweck, C. S. (2006). *Mindset: The new psychology of success*. New York, New York: Random House.

Dweck explained the difference between people with a fixed mindset and those with a growth mindset. Someone with a growth mindset believes that abilities can be developed. It's about stretching yourself to learn something new. A fixed mindset is about validating yourself and proving that you are smart and talented. A fixed mindset views failure as having a setback, while with a growth mindset failure is about growing, reaching for things you value or fulfilling your potential. Mindsets are beliefs and beliefs can be changed. I can change my mindset. As I embark on this journey, I will examine what mindset I'm carrying with me.

Goessling, K., & Doyle, C. (2009). Thru the lenz: Participatory action research, photography, and creative process in an urban high school. *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health*, 4(4), 343-365. doi:10.1080/15401380903375979

This article described how counseling psychology graduate students collaborated with high school students in a participatory action research project called, *Thru the Lenz*. This project was created in order to gain insight into the lives, experiences, and communities of the students. It utilized photography, creative processes, and a humanistic approach to relationship building.

Thru the Lenz gave cameras to young people with the belief that they would be equipped to express themselves as individuals through their own vision, words, and images. The researchers believed that the process would be empowering and eye-opening. The photos served

as a vehicle for discussion and awareness. The researchers distributed rolls of film and one disposable camera to each participant during the project. Participants took photos at home, at school, and in their communities. From each roll of film, participants were asked to pick one to three of their favorite pictures to discuss.

Goessling & Doyle (2009) asserted that:

Art can open one to the idea that anything is possible and, therefore, boost self-esteem.

The use of imagination can instill hope and belief that there are alternatives and possibilities to what is. Photographs and artwork can serve as a medium for externalization that may provide feelings of distance and safety for individuals when discussing themselves or personal issues on a deep level. (p. 346)

I have documented my journey to living a creative life through photos. They express an aspect of my life and provide insight into what it means for me to live creatively.

Khan, A. (2017). *Adapt: How humans are tapping into nature's secrets to design and build a better future*. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press.

In this book, Khan gives wonderful examples of how nature simply handles problems that humans spend millions of dollars in time, resources, and efforts to solve. By examining our natural environment, we can learn about sustainable technology and innovation. She stated "It's remarkable how much you can pick up from the natural world if you pay attention" (p. 7).

I have been paying attention to nature, sometimes pulling on the side of the road to notice the beauty of ice crystals forming on a wall of rocks or the beauty of trees blanketed by a fresh snowfall. There is a sense of wonder, inspiration, and gratitude when focusing in on all of the natural beauty that surrounds us.

Martin, D., Katz-Buonincontro, J., & Livert, D. (2015). Understanding the role of openness to experience in study abroad students. *Journal of College Student Development*, 56(6), 619.

In this study, 59 undergraduate students completed a survey assessing aspects of openness to experience, race and cultural understanding, and critical thinking before and after they studied abroad for 3 months. Results showed an increase in students' knowledge of and ability to comprehend new cultures, particularly among those who initially indicated a low openness to experience. Openness to experience was defined as traits such as being imaginative, creative, cultured, original, broad-minded, intelligent, and artistically sensitive. The findings supported the assertion that study abroad is transformative in nature.

I included this article because a part of this project included my trip to Morocco. As I traveled, I monitored my own openness to experience. Engaging with and learning about another culture served as a personally transformative experience.

Noller, R. B., & Mauthe, E. (1977). *Scratching the surface of creative problem-solving: A bird's eye-view of CPS*. Buffalo, NY: D.O.K. Publishers.

My favorite quote from this book is...

Each of us has many talents and capabilities which we fail to recognize...and which we, therefore, use to a minimum...rather than to the maximum. The result is often...then...that we tend to scratch the surface of everyday living...rather than living toward our fullest potential. CPS helps us to do that. (p. 40)

My intention through this project is to learn what it means to live a creative life and ultimately to begin living toward my fullest potential.

Parnes, S.J. (1988). *Vizionizing*. Buffalo, NY: Creative Education Foundation.

When Parnes (1988) expressed his vision of the 21st century, he incorporated creativity, CPS, visionary thinking, self-help programs, and self-actualization all towards the idea of fostering holistic wellness.

I contemplate a fourth generation of deliberate creativity development processes by the turn of the century. My vision of it is the blending of ...spontaneous imagery supported within solid CPS structure, applied together with self-healing technology toward the goal of high-level wellness – not merely physical wellness, but psychological, sociological, political and spiritual wellness as well – moving toward what Maslow meant by self-actualization individuals, whose main purpose in life is self-actualizing themselves and helping others do the same... to higher levels on an infinite continuum of human potential development. I see deliberate use of imagery within CPS processes, blended with self-help programs, carrying thousands toward levels attained in the past by only a handful of saints or gurus. My vision for the next century is the effective mating of Visioning with current healing technologies in ways which will help people become ‘self-healers’ in a physical sense, ‘self-integrators, in a social sense, ‘self-governors’ in a political sense, and ‘self-godlike’ in a spiritual sense. (p. 22)

This book was amazing. It was important for me to read about the vision that Parnes had for the future of creative living. He laid the foundation, provided the path and the vision for generations to come.

Peterson, C. (2015). Walkabout: Looking in, looking out: A mindfulness-based art therapy program. *Art Therapy*, 32(2), 78-82. doi:10.1080/07421656.2015.1028008

This article described a mindfulness-based art therapy intervention, “Walkabout: Looking In, Looking Out,” offered at the Abramson Cancer Center at Pennsylvania Hospital in

Philadelphia. Walkabout integrated mindful outdoor walking with participants taking digital photographs followed by using their pictures to construct collages within an experiential framework of mindfulness and creativity. Participant's reported a range of benefits, including increasing their ability to make meaning, stress reduction, relaxation, opening them up to a larger world and wellness.

Photography coupled with mindfulness has tremendous benefits. A big part of this project involves the documentation of the benefits of both.

Rhimes, S. (2015). *Year of yes: How to dance it out, stand in the sun and be your own person*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks.

This book was one of my favorite reads. In it, Shonda Rhimes, creator and executive producer of such shows as "Grey's Anatomy", "How to get away with Murder", and "Scandal" chronicles what she calls her "year of yes". Prompted by a comment from her sister who said, "You never say yes to anything", Rhimes opened herself up by saying "yes" to everything that was scary, took her out of her comfort zone, felt like it might be crazy, felt out of character, felt goofy, which was basically everything. This resulted in a transformation of her mind, spirit, soul, and body.

Embarking on my journey to live a creative life, involves me opening myself to new experiences, adventures, potentials, and possibilities.

Conclusion

All of these resources served as a guide or compass during my exploration. They inform my ongoing development and journey for exploring the world, my environment and more importantly myself. As I say "yes" to my future, I do so with a growth mindset and I'm documenting the adventure through expressive modalities.

Other literature that has influenced my everyday creative work (i.e. activities for living a creative life, daily inspirational reading, or foundational creativity concepts) includes the bibliography below:

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Websites and Videos

<http://www.awakin.org/>

<https://www.ideo.com/pages/design-thinking>

<https://www.mindtools.com/community/index.php>

<https://www.presencing.com/theoryu>

<http://threeminuteleadership.com/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ub27yeXKUTY> The Second Circle

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SemHh0n19LA> Designing Your Life- Bill Burnett

SECTION THREE: PROCESS PLAN

Plan to Achieve Goals

On a weekly basis, I focused on an area of the expressive arts and personal development or engaged in an experience (i.e. travel) to discover “what it means to live a deliberately creative life”. Areas for exploration included:

- Nature & Travel
- Everyday Creativity/Personal Creativity
- Openness to Experience
- The Expressive Arts (e.g. taking an art, dance class, photography, going to a museum, listening to different kinds of music)
- Mediation and Mindfulness

Exploration ranged from reading an article that took 15 minutes to a deeper exploration that lasted a couple of weeks (i.e. trip to Morocco). Because I sought to explore the world of creativity, my discovery was not limited to taking in information but also included seeking out new experiences, and new interactions. For each source of information and/or experience, I documented (e.g. journal/log, photograph, visual representation) what I learned, the impact that it had on me, and potential use for others. This included the development of activities for a workshop and other visual representations.

Project Timeline

Date	Task	Amount of Time to Complete
Wk. 1 Jan 8	Met with Dr. Burnett; Researched and began my concept paper (researching, reading, and writing)	23.5 hrs.
Wk. 2 Jan 15	Worked on Concept paper; Researching, reading, writing; Attended workshop: Unlocking Deep CPS: Create an Emerging Future (3 hrs.);	9 hrs.
Wk. 3 Jan 22	Worked on Concept paper; Researching, reading, writing; Webinar Evaluating the Impact of Design Thinking; Acting and Improv Training (5 ½ hrs.); Dance and Creativity: Bungee Dance and Aerial Yoga	11.5 hrs.
Wk. 4 Jan 29	Worked on Concept paper; Researching, reading, writing; ZOOM class meeting; Connected with sounding board partner	5 hrs.
Wk. 5 Feb 5	Worked on Concept paper; Researching, reading, writing; Reviewed sounding board partner's concept paper and provided feedback; Traveled to Morocco; Focus of study: multi-cultural travel, nature, and creativity. Documented experience.	4 hrs.
Wk. 5 Feb 12	Finalized concept paper; Traveled within Morocco. The focus of study: multi-cultural travel, nature, and creativity. Documented experience.	5hrs.
Wk. 5 Feb 19	Literature review; documented learning outcomes	5hrs.
Wk. 6 Feb 26	Selected and focused on an area of the expressive arts, personal development or engaged in an experience and documented learning outcomes; Worked on sections 1-3; ZOOM class meeting	9 hrs.
Wk. 7 Mar 5	Worked on Sections 1-3	10 hrs.
Wk. 8 Mar 12	Selected and focused on an area of the expressive arts, personal development or engaged in an experience and documented learning outcomes	5 hrs.
Wk. 9 Mar 19	Selected and focused on an area of the expressive arts, personal development or engaged in an experience and documented learning outcomes; ZOOM class meeting; Attended Florida Creativity Weekend.	30 hrs.
Wk. 10 Mar 26	Selected and focused on an area of the expressive arts, personal development or engaged in an experience and documented learning outcomes	5 hrs.
Wk. 11 April 2	Selected and focused on an area of the expressive arts, personal development or engaged in an experience and documented learning outcomes	5 hrs.

Wk. 12 April 9	Worked on Sections 4-6; Attended Tri-mania	12 hrs.
Wk. 13 April 16	Worked on Sections 4-6; Reviewed and Revised Project	7 hrs.
Wk. 14 April 23	Reviewed and Revised Project; Prepared Presentation	9 hrs.
Wk. 15 April 30	Submitted Final Project; Prepared Presentation	4 hrs.
Wk. 16 May 7	Finalized presentation; Delivered presentation; Uploaded Presentation to the Digital Commons; ZOOM class meeting	4hrs.
Wk. 17 May 14	Relax its over	0 hrs.
Total		163 hrs.

SECTION FOUR: OUTCOMES

Introduction

Over the past three months, as a creativity explorer, I have reviewed research related to the expressive arts and personal development and engaged in an experience to discover “what it means to live a creative life.” I have had numerous experiences such as engaging in the creative and expressive arts (e.g. bungee dance, aerial yoga, acro-yoga, fly barre trapeze, shimmy fusion, core aerial, cirque circuit, glassblowing, art therapy, rock painting; journaling, poetry, photography); traveling internationally to Morocco and stateside to Sarasota, FL; and many other events (e.g. belly dancing, drum circle, plays/shows, art exhibits, museums).

The products of this project include photographs from my fitness and performance art classes, a selection of poems that I have written, photographs from nature, my trips to Morocco and Sarasota, Fl., a sampling of activities to assist others in exploring their creative lives, and the start of a book to future generations.

Creative and Expressive Arts

As discussed earlier, the creative and expressive arts included activities such as, art, music, dance, drama, photography, poetry, and journaling. As an explorer of creativity, I wanted to try something novel and useful related to fitness and performance art. What I found was UP! Aerial Fitness. Figures 1-4 are photographs taken of me at UP! Aerial Fitness. Engaging in these activities was a form of creative movement, which supported my self-awareness.

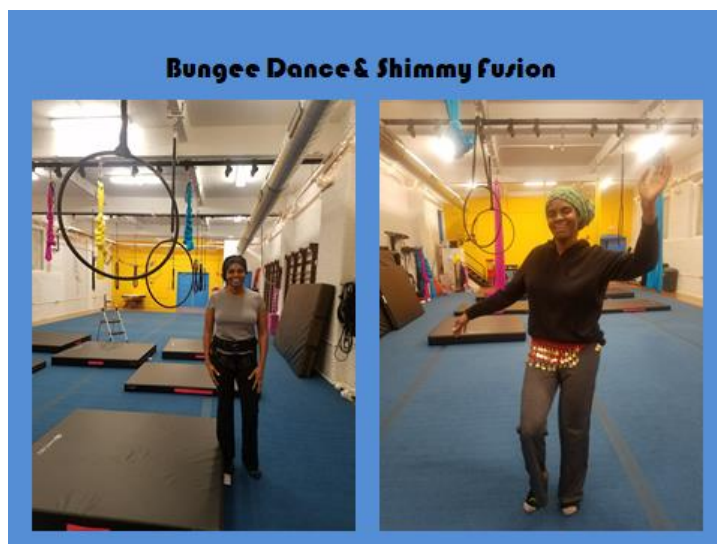


Figure 1. Me at Bungee Dance and Shimmy Fusion at Up! Aerial Fitness. January 22, 2018; March 14 respectively.



Figure 2. Me at Fly Barre Trapeze at Up! Aerial Fitness. February 20, 2018.



Figure 3. Me at Aerial Yoga at Up! Aerial Fitness. January 25, 2018.



Figure 4. Me at Acro Yoga at Up! Aerial Fitness. April 5, 2018.

As mentioned previously, in addition to fitness and performance art, I also engaged in glassblowing, art therapy, rock painting, writing poetry, photography, and journaling. The next areas I will discuss are writing poetry, photography, and journaling.

Poetry, photography, and journaling

Writing poetry and journaling my experiences through photography allowed me to tap into my subconscious and bring thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and motivations into the conscious realm of my mind. I have never written poetry before until I was on the plane traveling to Paris in route to Morocco. I had just watched part of a documentary titled *Human* when all of a sudden, I had this overwhelming urge to write. The words did not come out as they had when I journaled, but in the form of poetry and spoken word poetry (I recorded it on my cell phone).

Figure 5 is the first poem that I wrote. The background photograph was taken by me in Morocco of a mural on the wall of an ancient medina. Figure 6 is a poem that I wrote after returning home from Morocco. The background photograph was also taken by me from the top of a sand dune in the Sahara Desert while waiting for sunset.

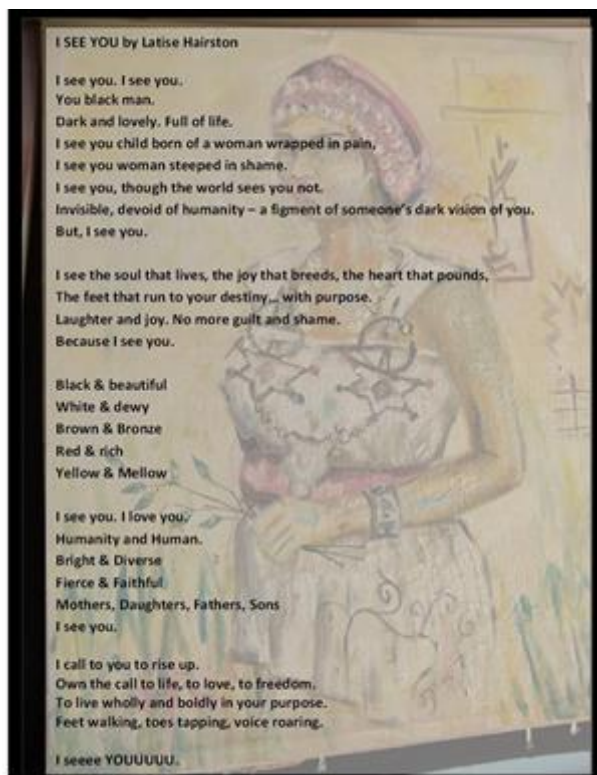


Figure 5. My first poem written on the plane in route to Paris. February 6, 2018.

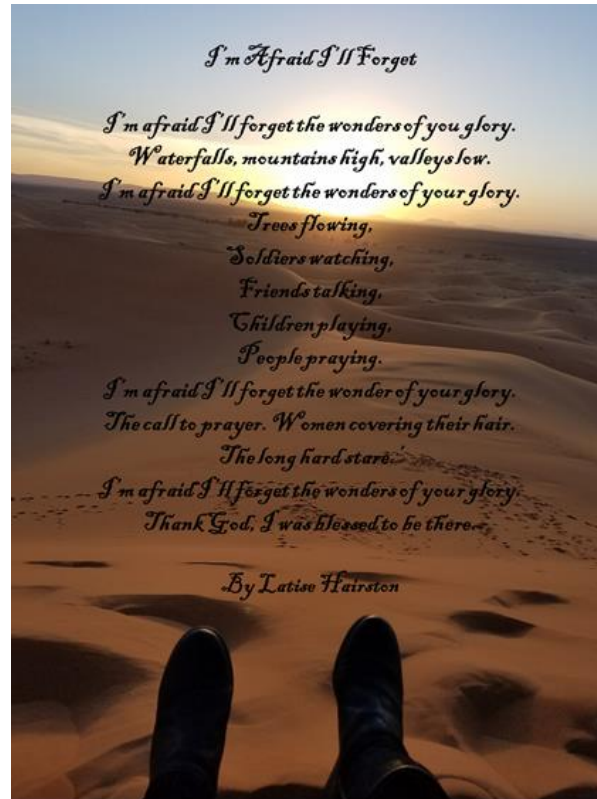


Figure 6. A poem written upon my return home from Morocco. February 22, 2018.

I have been documenting my journey through photography. Photography has not only been a means for documentation, but also a large part of my creative expression. I have been paying attention to nature, sometimes pulling on the side of the road to notice the beauty of ice crystals forming on a wall of rocks or the beauty of trees blanketed by a fresh snowfall (See Appendix A). While I cannot include all of my photographs in this paper, Appendix B contains photographs from my glassblowing and rock painting classes. Appendix C contains some of the photos from my trip to Morocco. Additionally, I have created two pdf documents, one with just photos from Morocco and the other with other photos of my creative journey. Appendix D has photographs of the two journals that I documented my journey in.

Creative Products

Monthly collage cards

Dweck (2006) explains that a growth mindset believes that abilities can be developed. It's about stretching yourself. Also, practicing mindfulness and conscientiousness are positively related to everyday creativity (Chen, 2016; Dhiman, 2012). I created the Monthly Collage Cards (see Appendix E for the prototype) to foster a growth mindset. This is also an activity that can be done individually or with a group creating their collage cards. The name of the month is placed at the top of the card (stock paper can be used). Then images or words related to that month are placed on the remainder of the card (have art supplies and magazines available for use). On the back of the card, there are three prompts, 1. Moments I want to remember (from the month); 2. What I've accomplished; 3. My intention for next month. The purpose is to "take stock of" and honor key moments within the month and to set intentions for growth for the upcoming month. This activity incorporates art and expressive writing.

Kindness bracelet

The next activity was sparked during a conversation with my friend Heidi (personal communication, April 10, 2018). We were talking about acts of kindness and she said that she wanted to have kids create something like a bracelet that would remind them to be kind. So this activity is the 30-day Kindness Bracelet.

- Materials: string, 7 medium size beads and 2 large beads (one representing sunrise and one sunset).
- Beads are placed on the bracelet. Everyday plan to do an intentional act of kindness (e.g. compliment a stranger; leave a kind note, etc.). A bead is placed in between the "sunrise" and "sunset" for each day of the week that an act of kindness is performed.

- Document what impact it had on the other person and on you.

Children's Book

One evening after spending the day at the Florida Creativity Conference, I was looking at pictures of my grandson and I was thinking about how I would transmit the lessons, thoughts, and words of wisdom that I have learned related to creativity to him and to future generations. I began making a list and in about half an hour I had 194 items (see Appendix F). This is the beginning of a book for future generation titled *Color the Sun Purple and Draw Outside the Lines*. I got the idea for the title from a friend of mine, Jan, who told me a story about her daughter when she was young. Her daughter had gone over to a friend's house to play and she came home upset. When her mother asked her why she said that she and her friend were coloring and when her friend's mother scolded her for coloring the sun purple and drawing outside the lines. Jan, who is a trained fiber artist, only gave her daughter plain paper to draw on at home and not coloring books because she didn't want her to be constrained. She affirmed her daughter and celebrated her for coloring the sun purple and drawing outside the lines. This is the gift that I want to give to my grandson and to future generations. Weston (2007) eloquently expressed my sentiment with this definition of creativity. It is the ability to think 'out of the box' while the rest of us barely realize that we are in the box" (p. VI). Jan refused to allow her daughter to be "boxed in". She fostered her creativity. This takes me back to my definition of creativity, "to push past the inner voices of limitation and lack; to move toward possibilities and potential and manifest them" (Hairston, April 16, 2017). In addition to this book, I'm currently refining and editing a curriculum that I wrote to empower women to manifest possibilities in their lives.

In addition to the above-mentioned products, my greatest outcomes come from my key learnings which can be found in the next section.

SECTION FIVE: KEY LEARNINGS

Introduction

When I began this project at the beginning of January, my intent was to become an explorer in the world of creativity for the purpose of learning and self-improvement. What it has actually become is a process of an ongoing transformation. As an explorer, I have traveled new territory for adventure and discovery. Brene Brown proposed that creativity “is the act of paying attention to our experiences and connecting the dots so we can learn more about ourselves and the world around us” (Brown, 2017, p. 42). In this section, I will talk about what I have learned in the process and about myself.

Expressive Dance

When I first began this project, I thought it was all about the experiences. They were fun. I enjoyed flying through the air during bungee dance and wrapping myself up in a silk cocoon in aerial yoga, but at the same time, it was physically hard. Journaling the experience while asking myself “what does this mean for me and my growth?” challenged me to really look at my values, perceptions, beliefs, and all the stories that I was telling myself.

During the fitness and expressive dance classes, I definitely stepped outside of my comfort zone and positioned my body in ways that I thought that I could not do. I had to use muscles that I often do not use to pull myself up and to hold positions. While it was very difficult, it was also very invigorating. I felt like a child soaring through the air, letting go, and going with the momentum. I was taking a risk while being open to the experience and moving beyond my comfort zone. In reality, I was re-creating my zone of comfort, making it more expansive. While “flying” and tumbling I saw my world from a different perspective literally and figuratively. Actress Mary Lou Cook said, “Creativity is inventing, experimenting, growing,

taking risks, breaking rules, making mistakes, and having fun” (“Forbes Quotes: Thoughts on the business of life”, n.d.). I embodied all of these in my classes. After one of my classes, I wrote in my journal, “After using my strength to pull myself up and fly, I feel like I can do anything. Life is an open door full of possibilities and opportunities. All I have to do is soar and fly through any closed door.”

One of the exercises that I did in Aerial Yoga was to climb into the silk and wrap it around myself as if I was in a cocoon. As instructed, I slowly emerged out one foot at a time on the other side of the silks. This stimulated the experience of new birth. Living a creative life is about pushing past limitations and emerging anew every day. Engaging in these activities was a form of creative movement, which supported my self-awareness.

Poetry

Writing poetry and journaling my experiences through photography, and nature allowed me to tap into my subconscious and bring thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and motivations into the conscious realm of my mind. According to Goessling and Doyle (2009), they can serve as a means to “travel” to familiar and unfamiliar places within the heart, mind, and soul toward future possibilities. As a result, I have greater self and spiritual awareness. While engaging in these activities, I experienced what Csikszentmihalyi (1990) calls “flow”. Flow is a mental state of operation in which a person is fully immersed in what he or she is doing, characterized by a feeling of energized focus, full involvement, and success in the process of the activity.

As I mentioned before, I have never written poetry before until I was on the plane to Morocco. The words did not come out as they had when I was journaling but in the form of poetry. I was in flow. By the time I landed in Morocco I had written about seven different poems. Since that time, I have written several more. The words wake me out of my sleep and call

me to write them down. I feel like I'm simply the conduit which they flow through to be expressed on paper or spoken word. This experience has also lead me to say "yes" to other experiences. Not only have I started writing poetry, but I also performed them during open mic night at a local coffee shop. I then shared that live feed on Facebook and have received over 700 views and comments about how my poem has inspired others. While sharing on Facebook might be the norm for others, it is definitely out of my comfort zone, as I almost never share anything personal.

Photography

Photography has helped me to zoom in and out on all of my surroundings. I'm noticing the world around me in a more focused way. It has become a part of my consciousness to intentionally examine my environment in a more finite and expansive way. One day I was traveling up a hill to Delaware County in a snowstorm when my rental car started to fishtail. It would not go any further up the hill due to the ice. I had to pull over and call emergency roadside assistance, which I waited over two hours for. While I was waiting I watched the snow fall in awe of its beauty on the trees. There is a sense of wonder, inspiration, and gratitude when focusing in on all of the natural beauty that surrounds me.

Travel

As noted previously, travel has been shown to increase creativity by relieving stress, providing a diversity of experience, leading to greater flexibility and originality of ideas (de Bloom, Ritter, Kühnel, Reinders, & Geurts, 2014; Maddux, Adam, & Galinsky, 2010). Since the beginning of this project, the major trip that I embarked on was to Morocco. It's very difficult to find the words to adequately capture the experience. There were times that being there felt transcendent and unreal, almost like I was watching a movie that I was playing in. One of those

times was when I was riding a camel in the Sahara Desert in a caravan. Although I was surrounded by people, I felt like I was there alone in stillness and quiet. There was an overwhelming sense of peace and connection with spirit. I felt wholeness, and unspeakable joy and gratitude. This feeling inspired a poem that I wrote titled *I have no words, I have no speech*. I had so many different experiences, including visiting medinas, mosques, a home visit with a host family, traveling through the mountains, going to the beach, visiting ancient ruins, touring museums and churches, a belly dancing show, seeing goats that had climbed a tree, holding a baby goat, touring via horse-drawn carriage, watching a snake charmer, and the daily call to prayer. These were some of many experiences, and yet I still cannot explain the tremendous impact that it had on me. Even writing this brings tears of joy to my eyes. The people were gracious and kind. The history, architecture, and food were amazing.

Hearing the call to prayer and watching the people sometimes pray on a prayer rug/mat on the street was beyond magnificent. The dedication, devotion, and public display of community values were an inspiration. With all of the discourse that we are bombarded with in the US, the picture I saw was not congruent with the people I engaged with. There was an atmosphere of love and generosity of heart and spirit that was infectious. It made me take inventory of my thoughts, values and behaviors and how I show up in the world. Langer (2015, p. 16) said that “It is only when we’ve awakened that we realize how much of our lives we’ve actually slept through.” One of the lines in a poem that I wrote about Morocco says, “I woke up...eyes wide open.” Metaphorically, now that I am awakened, I have no desire to go back to sleep. I know what it means to live a creative life and that includes people and community. One of the questions that I have asked myself is, “How can I have a Morocco experience every day? How to tap into the joy and feeling of transcendence?”

This journey has not been without adversity. Two weeks into this journey, I was informed that my place of employment for over twenty-one years would be closing as of December 31. To say the least, I was shocked and saddened. So while learning what it means to live a creative life, I have also been going through the stages of grief. Though it has been difficult at times, this has afforded me the opportunity to exercise my creative muscles and truly be an explorer of what is possible. I have had to let go of certainty and the fear of making mistakes and remain open, and curious in search of what can be. Journaling and surrounding myself with those in the creativity community have served as anchors during turbulent times and propellers when I need to be pushed out of my comfort zone.

In the workshops that I have attended, I learned how to use mindfulness, visioning, and play to provide solace and refuge from problems and help in solving them. Through the practice, I have used my imagination to see problems as possibilities. There have been moments when I was struggling with thoughts of limitation and lack. I began to think about when I was a little girl and I went to see the Broadway musical, *Annie*. I channeled the carefree, spirit of wonder and delight of me as a girl and started singing “The sun will come out tomorrow, bet your bottom dollar that tomorrow, they’ll be sun...” That then led to some dancing, singing, and laughter. The situation I was worried about did not change at the moment, but I changed my thinking about it.

Although I have had numerous experiences, the main thing that I have learned is that creativity is not just about the doing, it’s also about the being. Being open to new experiences, self-exploration, and having a growth mindset. At the beginning of this journey, I was at the consciously skilled stage of learning. My focus was on the doing. As I became more mindful and open, I began to see the world differently and instead of trying to live a creative life, I was becoming creative through my everyday living. Instead of passing by the trees with hanging

icicles that looked like there were diamonds, I stopped, noticed and captured the image in a photo, so that I could enjoy it again. I'm starting to move into a place where living a creative life is a part of my unconscious being. I am grateful for this journey of creative exploration that will continue throughout my life because it is who I am.

SECTION SIX: CONCLUSIONS

Like so many others, I believed that creativity was about someone other than me. I would say, “I’m not creative I can’t make...” As Moran (2010) argued, creativity as expression is about moment and momentum, not a product to be put on a pedestal. It is a way to cope with life’s challenges. The purpose and intention are about making meaning. The idea is that anyone can develop new ways to address life’s problems or think about possibilities rather than just focusing in on “what is”. By showing us the world or some part of the world, as it could be creativity gives us a whole new view of the world as it is (Weston 2007). Creativity’s role as expression is about the self and what is being expressed – manifesting the hidden potential that is inside. This concept is similar to Maslow’s (1968) assertion of creativity as a key component of self-actualization. To live the self-expressive life, the creative life, is to tread a path towards the deepest personal fulfillment (Lane, 2006).

Creativity is a state of mind, a learnable skill, and a practical everyday activity. Essentially, creativity provides a valuable emotional skill that helps with difficult situations through optimism and perseverance (Carson & Runco, 1999). A creative life is a fully integrated life, a matter of head, hand, and heart. It’s a way of thinking and doing and being. My journey in leadership from the inside out involves me clarifying my vision, identifying my purpose, and dedicating my life to a more intentional way of living and leading, beginning with “self - leadership” and mastering myself. I have to constantly examine who I am, where I need to go (vision), and how I can get there (the ongoing journey). I once saw a video produced by National Geographic and in it, the narrator said, “Try not to be the best in the world, be the best for the world”. That’s what the creativity program and this project have reinforced and given me the knowledge and skills to continue to do.

What I see myself doing next is:

- Continuing to be conscientious in my pursuit of living a creative life.
- Completing my book *Color the Sun Purple and Draw Outside the Lines*.
- Taking Improv classes that start next weekend.
- Signing up for salsa dance lessons and pursuing that which brings me joy.
- Continuing to write poetry, develop them into a published book and share my poetry at open mic nights and/or poetry slams. I have already submitted one of my poems to a local paper for the poetry edition.
- Share my journey at TEDx Buffalo.
- Finish developing a creativity workshop for women and facilitate it by October.
- Continue developing meaningful relationships with mentors in the field of creativity.
- Present at Mind Camp, Creative Problem Solving Institute, and other conferences next year.
- Ultimately to become a major contributor to the field of creativity and to help others improve their lives through my consultant company, Harvesting Opportunities with People Everywhere (HOPE).

So what does it mean to live a creative life, Parnes (1988) one of the great pioneers in the field of creativity expressed it best when he said:

I contemplate a fourth generation of deliberate creativity development processes by the turn of the century. My vision of it is the blending of ...spontaneous imagery supported within solid CPS structure, applied together with self-healing technology toward the goal of high-level wellness – not merely physical wellness, but psychological, sociological,

political and spiritual wellness as well – moving toward what Maslow meant by self-actualization individuals, whose main purpose in life is self-actualizing themselves and helping others do the same... to higher levels on an infinite continuum of human potential development. (p. 22)

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Appendix A

Photographs of ice on rocks and snow on trees in a snowstorm



Appendix B

Photographs from glass blowing and rock painting classes



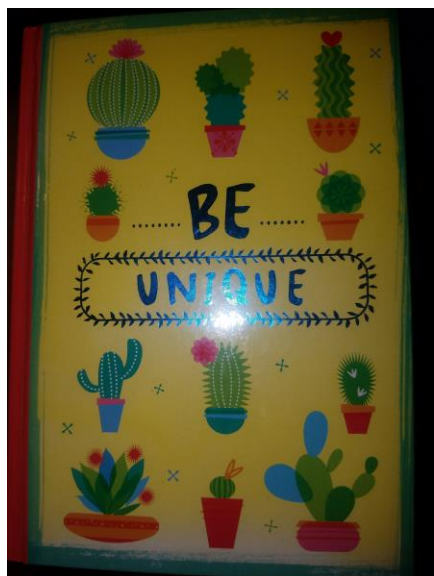
Appendix C

Photographs from my trip to Morocco



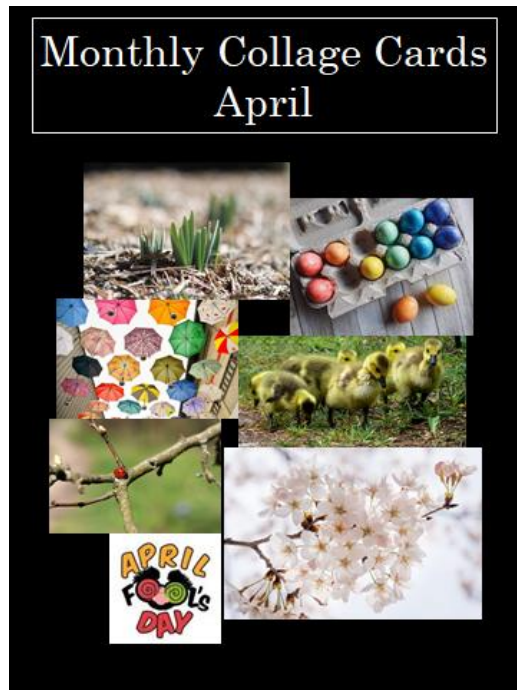
Appendix D

Photographs of my two journals



Appendix E

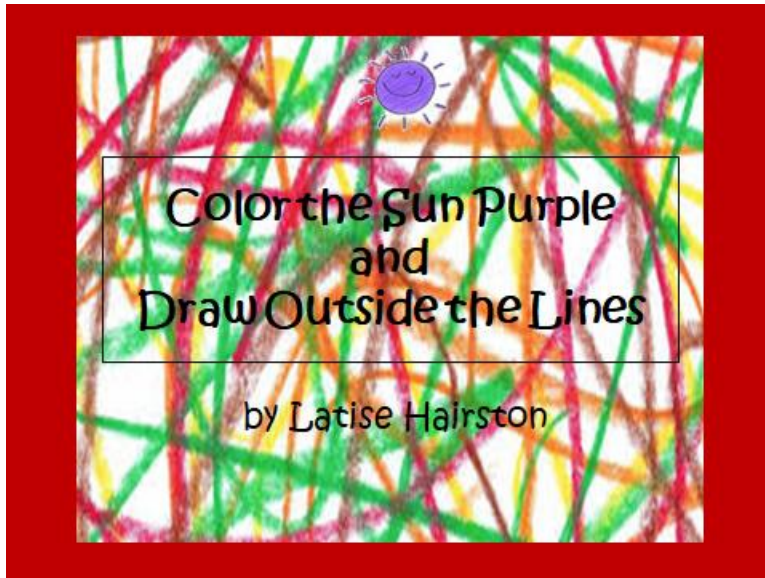
Monthly collage cards (front and back sides)

The back side of the card has a white background with a black border. At the top, there is a black silhouette of an umbrella. Inside the umbrella, the text "April showers" is written in a cursive font at the top, "BRING" is in a bold, sans-serif font in the middle, and "May flowers" is written in a cursive font at the bottom. Below the umbrella, there is a black background with three white bullet points, each followed by a line of text:

- Moments I want to remember:
- What I've accomplished:
- My intention for next month:

Appendix F

Cover for book to future generations and thoughts about living creatively



Notes for Future Generations aka my Random Thoughts

1. Eat dessert first
2. Stand in the Sun
3. Embrace Failure
4. Sing out Loud
5. Embrace Joy
6. Soak your feet
7. Live in wonder
8. Wear a clown nose
9. Swing on a swing
10. Go down a slide
11. Go up a slide
12. Make someone smile
13. Love yourself

14. Compliment a stranger
15. Run through a sprinkler
16. Jump all in
17. Live on the Edge
18. Play hopscotch
19. Sing jingle bells when it's not Christmas
20. Smile until you mean it
21. Laugh
22. Drive home a different way
23. Dance
24. Live Again
25. Embrace Ambiguity
26. HAVE HOPE
27. Give it Time
28. It gets better
29. Try something new
30. Step in a puddle
31. Live like it's your last day
32. Notice the color of someone's eyes
33. Look for beauty
34. Dance it out
35. Sing at the top of your lungs
36. Give yourself a hug
37. Sleep on a different side of the bed
38. Say "I love you"
39. Watch your favorite movie all day

40. Mix plaids and stripes
41. Notice
42. Play
43. Play again
44. Play some more
45. Leave kind notes for yourself
46. Capture two moments you want to remember everyday
47. Find your joy
48. Watch a video of puppies and kittens
49. Meditate
50. Breathe
51. Punch fear in the face
52. Concentrate on what's good
53. Eat chocolate
54. Go for a walk
55. Notice the beauty of nature
56. Focus on others
57. Smile at someone
58. Do random acts of kindness
59. Kiss someone you love
60. Hold Hands
61. Laugh
62. Be fully present
63. Take a timeout
64. Blank space, You add _____
65. Lean into life

66. Walk barefoot in the sand
67. Take a trip
68. Say something kind
69. Establish criticism-free zones
70. Do something for others
71. Spend some time getting to know yourself
72. Seek to be in awe of life
73. Watch the sunrise
74. Watch the sunset
75. Fully feel love
76. Jump rope
77. Compliment a stranger
78. Write down your thoughts and feelings
79. Take a picture of something that inspires you
80. Listen as if it's someone's last words
81. Focus on others
82. Practice kindness
83. Take a brain break
84. Relax your soul
85. Focus on what is meaningful
86. Get a massage
87. Say "yes" to living
88. Feel your pain, but don't live forever in it
89. Make a joy list
90. Watch comedy all day
91. Learn something new everyday

92. Service to others is the highest calling
93. Quiet your mind
94. Be still
95. Rest
96. Have adventure days
97. Make every day an adventure
98. Try something new
99. Make a bucket list
100. Live in the moment
101. Prepare for possibilities
102. See it, believe it, do it
103. Stand in your truth, but be open to others
104. Step into yourself fully
105. Let hope and possibility lead the way
106. Follow your path in many directions
107. Do big
108. Find the place where hope and opportunity meet
109. Fear is false evidence appearing real
110. Make a snow angel in the sand
111. Set your intention for the day
112. Do life, don't let life do you
113. Give the benefit of doubt
114. Live wholly
115. Live boldly
116. Be you!!!
117. Put down the mask

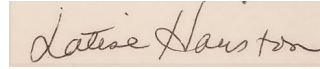
118. Come out of your shell
119. Break life open
120. Dive deeply into living
121. Mop up the mess with your best
122. Be a blessing
123. Show up fully
124. Do it even if you have to do it afraid
125. Check into life
126. Surrender to "Yes"
127. Surrender to possibilities
128. No either/or – Do both
129. Say "Yes and" instead of "Yes but"
130. Have a party of 1
131. Unpack your "baggage" and leave it
132. You are enough
133. Be comfortable sitting with someone in their pain
134. Wake up dancing
135. Jump for joy
136. Jump with joy
137. Volunteer
138. Serve others
139. Lead with the heart, head, and hand
140. Light up the room
141. Show the world who you are
142. SHINE
143. Quiet the inner critic

144. Speak life
145. Advocate for yourself
146. Encourage yourself
147. Be open to life's miracles
148. Listen to the rainfall
149. The world has been waiting just for you
150. Shift your focus
151. Challenge calls for change
152. See the world from a different angle
153. Change the furniture around
154. Use your non-dominant hand
155. Your value is in being who you are
156. Celebrate Life
157. Celebrate Others
158. Celebrate Yourself
159. Keep a Gratitude Journal
160. Give someone a Gratitude Journal
161. Celebrate the best in others
162. Celebrate what's right with the world
163. Stretch yourself
164. Focus on peace
165. Shake things up!!!
166. Choose to live
167. There are life lessons everywhere. Pay attention and be open to them
168. Every day is a celebration of life
169. Encourage others to live fully

170. Look for the silver lining in adversity
171. Make a difference in someone else's' life
172. Love deeply, embrace emotions...
173. Be glad you can feel...that's fully living
174. Give all of yourself
175. Scream at the top of your lungs and let it all out
176. Follow your heart
177. Follow your dream
178. Live with purpose
179. Take one step forward, the nest will come
180. One step at a time
181. Enjoy every moment
182. Live like your life depends on it, Cause it does
183. Be remembered
184. You are qualified
185. Do not deny who you were meant to be
186. Being creative is a conscious choice. It may not be easy, but it's worth it
187. Push, past your self-imposed limits
188. Joy is a choice
189. Take deep breathes often. It releases the tension
190. Tears can cleanse the heart and mend the soul
191. It's important to keep a record of the moments of your life
192. A timeline can tell you where you have been and where you want to go
193. Write the vision and make it plain
194. Color the sun purple and draw outside the lines

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I hereby grant permission to the International Center for Studies in Creativity at Buffalo State college permission to place a digital copy of this Master's Project "What does it mean to live a Creative Life?" as an online resource.

A rectangular box containing a handwritten signature in cursive script, which appears to read "Lattise Houston".

Name

May 6, 2018_____
Date